DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 727 EC 210 763

TITLE	The Disabled Student in Transition: Developing Cooperative State Models To Meet the Transition Needs of Disabled Youth: An Interagency Approach.
INSTITUTION	Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC. Resource Center on Educational Equity.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	[88]
GRANT	158DH60008
NOTE	16p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agency Cooperation; Cooperative Planning; Demonstration Programs; *Disabilities; Educational Planning; *Education Work Relationship; Models; Needs Assessment; Parent Role; *Program Development; Secondary Education; State Departments of Education; *State Programs; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Idaho; Maine; New York; Washington

ABSTRACT

Many barriers exist in the transition of disabled students from the educational system to postsecondary life. Transition systems have been developed to overcome these barriers, focusing on the needs of the individual, the role of parents, and the role of the state education agency. Several cooperative interagency models have been created by states to meet students' transition needs. The state plans described represent diverse geographic locations, demographics, agency structures, transition concerns, and intervention strategies. Idaho's plan emphasizes identification of the extent of need for transition services; implementation of the interagency transition process; and solutions to barriers encountered when developing pre-employment training, support work options, independent living options, and transition teams. Maine's plan includes in the interagency agreement the specific roles and responsibilities of each agency. New York's plan focuses on early referral to vocational rehabilitation and ongoing sharing of information among special educators, occupational educators, and vocational rehabilitation personnel. Washington's model attempts to unify its fragmented services through a state-level transition plan. (JDD)

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The Disabled Student In Transition

Developing Cooperative State Models to Meet the Transition Needs of Disabled Youth: An Interagency Approach

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Prepared under Grant No. 158DH60008 from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U.S. Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred.

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THE CONCERN

As young people graduate from our nation's high schools, the future usually seems full of promise. Thoughts turn to further education and learning opportunities, career options, employment, leisure activities, fun with friends, and greater independence from families. However, the transition from school to postsecondary life can also be difficult, and decisions concerning the future are often sources of apprehension and anxiety for many nondisabled young adults. For individuals who are also disabled this apprehension and anxiety can be overwhelming. For disabled students, graduation or "aging-out" of school often means fewer learning opportunities, no job or career opportunities, less opportunity to be with peers, and increased dependence on their families.

Through the implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, disabled persons have been afforded greater educational opportunities and increased protection against discrimination based on their disabilities. Parallel emphasis on mainstreaming in the classroom as well as the community and the impetus to employ persons with disabilities have ushered in a new era of opportunity for the disabled. Access to education, vocational training, employment, and independent living--nonexistent a few years ago--is now a reality for many. At the same time, society's expectations concerning the ability of disabled persons to become self-sufficient citizens are also rising as more effective treatment and training strategies are made available.

"Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life. Any bridge requires both a solid span and a secure foundation at either end."

Madeleine Will, Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, 1984

"While P.L. 94-142 has led handicapped youth and young adults to the edge of day-to-day American life, it has not made the bridge between life in school and life in the world of work."

Beckett, Chitwood and Hayden, 1985

BARRIERS TO TRANSITION

Despite new opportunities and elevated expectations, harsh realities and barriers often await many disabled students at the threshold of adulthood. They may learn that:

1. In spite of the structure and opportunities afforded by the educational system, large numbers of disabled students will not be prepared for many aspects of postsecondary life. Their education may not have included:
   - the acquisition of independent living skills;
   - work experience with the nondisabled in a community setting;
   - career counseling and planning;
   - appropriate vocational assessment;
   - vocational training and preparation designed to meet employment needs of the community; or
   - basic academic skills necessary to achieve success in a college or university setting.

Of the approximately 300,000 disabled youth who graduate from high school special education programs each year, the vast majority encounter severe unemployment and underemployment problems. In spite of the fact that two-thirds of the disabled unemployed indicate they want to work:

- The majority (67 percent) of all Americans with handicaps between ages 16 and 64 are not working.
- If a disabled individual is working, he or she is 75 percent more likely to be employed on a part-time basis than a nondisabled person (Rusch and Phelps, 1986).

While the economic status of the disabled population as a whole is grim, that of disabled females and minority males is even more distressing. Whereas disabled white men earn 52 cents for each dollar earned by nondisabled white males:

- disabled minority men earn only 25 cents on the dollar;
- disabled white women earn only 24 cents; and
- disabled minority women earn 12 cents (Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, 1984).

Census data from 1982 indicated that the mean earnings for disabled women were $5,835 as compared to $13,863 for disabled men.

"These employment figures are less a function of the handicapping condition than a reflection of the community in which an individual lives and the prevailing social attitude towards people with disabilities."

Association for Retarded Citizens of the United States, 1986

2. In contrast to the mandated responsibility of public education to serve all disabled children, adult service agencies are not mandated to serve all disabled adults.

   In Addition:

   - Services (including further learning opportunities, employment and rehabilitation programs, advocacy, transportation, recreation, legal services, and living arrangements) are fragmented across agencies.
   - Agency personnel are uninformed about each other's services.
   - Eligibility requirements vary (e.g., a client may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation which looks at employment potential but not for supplemental security income).
   - Definitions of disability vary (e.g., while schools use the federal definition of handicaps as defined in the Education of the Handicapped Act, other service providers may not use the same definitions for eligibility).
   - Funding limitations in the adult service system result in long waiting lists for residential or work options.

3. There has been a lack of cooperative planning among educators (secondary and postsecondary), adult service providers, parents, and employers to ensure a continuum of necessary support.
4. Opportunities to secure independent living arrangements are limited.
5. No follow-up or follow-along has been provided to ensure a realistic match between the services provided by the schools and the post-school experience.
6. Disabled persons are underutilized and/or discriminated against by employers who are unwilling to provide training and employment opportunities without incentives that are good for business.

"For handicapped youth all too often the end of high school means curtailment of support services and deprivation of opportunities to live and work in the mainstream of society."

"Florida's Exceptional Students in Transition—From School to Community", 1986

"Workers with handicaps who have employment by and large have secured it through a friend or family connection, not through professional job placement services."

Wehman, Kresel, and Seyforth, 1985

"The goal of the transition process is to assure meaningful work that provides adequate compensation in terms of income, job satisfaction, and opportunity for personal growth and independence for each person with a disability."

O'Toole and Meissner, 1987

TRANSITION SYSTEMS

In an effort to overcome grim realities and barriers facing disabled students seeking to realize their postsecondary options, systems of transition have been developed. These transition systems are designed to ensure the continuation of needed services and the availability of education and training appropriate to the rigors and requirements of adult life. Roles are evolving for educators, service providers, parents, employers, states, and localities for ensuring a smooth transition for disabled individuals.

The transition needs of the individual can range through several levels depending upon the abilities of the disabled student and the quality of the secondary school education previously received.

1. No special services may be needed by a mildly disabled person beyond those routinely made available to the nondisabled person seeking regular employment. Services may include short-term help with job preparation, job searches, initial adjustment and interpersonal relations on the job site. Vocational and technical schools as well as community and four-year colleges are important to this kind of transition, as are family contacts, volunteer jobs, and neighborhood networks. The number of disabled persons moving to employment and postsecondary education through this route is unknown, but the potential for development especially in community and vocational/technical schools is great for mildly disabled citizens.
2. Time limited services such as vocational rehabilitation, job training programs, and postsecondary vocational education programs can often be used by individuals considered capable of maintaining a regular job once services are withdrawn. In the past almost all transitional programs have been time-limited and have not included young people with severe disabilities.
3. Ongoing services that combine work opportunities with independent living services will be needed by students with more severe disabilities. These services include training and employment and provide support on a lifelong basis if necessary. This transition process can call for the creation of supported employment options such as specialized training programs in industry, work crews and enclaves, and supported supervision (Will, 1984, RRTC, 1985).

ROLE OF PARENTS

Preparing all students to be independent in their living skills and employable in the marketplace are major goals. However, it takes careful planning and preparation for post-school placement. Key to the success of these goals is the role of parental concern and involvement. To ensure effective parent/guardian involvement in the transition process, schools should encourage parents to participate in planning for their child's postsecondary life as early as elementary school. Schools can work with parents to identify postsecondary education and employment opportunities as well as other alternatives available in the local community. Families may need to be informed about community agencies in order to understand the services available and what the eligibility requirements may be. Parents must be involved in the development and implementation of a written, formal transition plan. Parents can be encouraged to work with their children at home to promote appropriate behavior, good grooming, completion of chores, wise handling of money, as much independence as possible, and as many opportunities as possible to explore and enjoy the community (RRTC, 1985).

"Parents do vary in their interest in being active. Not all parents choose to be decisionmakers or advocates or teachers for their children; not all parents feel comfortable in planning educational services. We may carry with us our past history of intimidation by professionals, our fear of authority figures. There are ways that school people can encourage parental participation in transition planning. Raising awareness through meetings, site visits, panel presentations, media coverage, and active communication will help. Enlisting parent advocacy agencies, adult service providers, and funding sources in information-sharing, and encouraging parents who have seen significant results from transition services to share their perceptions may increase new parent involvement in the transition planning process."

Cory Moore, parent of a 23-year-old daughter with multiple handicaps.

"A solid secondary educational program incorporates both academic and occupational education starting in early junior high years. The more closely the program of a student with a handicapping condition matches his/her nonhandicapped peers, the more competitive they can be in employment and the community."

Cynthia Gallagher, Coordinator of Secondary Programs, Office for Education of Children with Handicapping Conditions, New York Education Department

"Schools must accept at least partial responsibility for the outcomes of students after they leave school."

Carla Jackson, Transition Project Coordinator, Washington Department of Public Instruction

THE ROLE OF THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

While state education agencies and local school systems alone cannot meet the transition needs of disabled youth, education officials can provide crucial leadership and enter into cooperative programs with adult service providers. (Adult service providers include community agencies responsible for mental health; day programs; supported work; and residential, leisure, recreation, and rehabilitation services.) Interagency cooperation is essential given the complexity and diversity of transitional needs and the wide range of service providers. Interagency cooperation provides a vehicle through which educators and adult service providers can establish a common terminology and become knowledgeable about each other's services and eligibility requirements.

The focus of any cooperative transition program must be on serving the individual needs and developing the abilities and talents of each disabled student. To meet individual needs and to overcome current barriers to smooth transitions, all cooperative programs among agencies should encourage the following generic components:

1. A continuum of educational services which begin in the early grades increasingly exposing all children with disabilities to the post-school world and its responsibilities.
   - Knowledge and skills should be those identified as essential to all individuals in their personal, family, home, community, and work responsibilities.
   - Career education and work preparation must supplement but not replace academic skills.
   - Actual training and job preparation should take place in nonsegregated community environments that offer "real job" experience.
2. Joint development of individual written transition plans by regular, special, and vocational education; guidance; and vocational rehabilitation based on the distinct needs of each disabled student to give direction to the individual education plans. Plans should incorporate creative, flexible, and nontraditional approaches to serve the needs of students from all three broad levels of transition.

3. Active participation by parents and students themselves in the transition planning process to: develop realistic life goals; determine appropriate educational and occupational outcomes; and identify continuing services necessary once the student leaves school.

4. Inclusion of business and other potential employers in program planning so that schools are responsive to the labor market needs in the community and business is: a) informed about the capabilities of disabled persons; and b) encouraged to hire disabled persons for competitive jobs, to create supported employment opportunities, and to provide work-study programs for students still in school.

5. Cooperative efforts with a variety of postsecondary education and occupational programs (e.g., four-year colleges, community colleges, occupational education, and vocational rehabilitation) to meet the wide range of abilities among disabled students.

6. Greater follow-up of disabled students into adulthood to evaluate the effectiveness of transition programs and target areas for improvement.

7. Constant attention to the particular needs of female and minority students because of the double and triple jeopardy faced by these students when bias based on disabling conditions combine with lingering biases based on sex, race, and national origin.

"Because students with disabilities often need additional services and resources to make smooth transitions, schools must become aware of what is available to assist them. Through cooperative planning efforts among parents, service providers, employers, and the community, the quality of life continues to improve."

Jani Lambrou, Consultant, Special Education, Idaho Department of Education

MODEL STATE PLANS

With a two-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, the Council of Chief State School Officers Resource Center on Educational Equity assisted four state education agencies in developing cooperative interagency state models to meet the transition needs of disabled students. The four states represent diverse geographic locations, demographics, agency structures, transition concerns, and intervention strategies. Although each has a strong commitment to transition issues, the states differ in their approaches and levels of development in addressing these issues. In each state the CCSSO Resource Center/state focus was a component of a broader, ongoing approach to transition.

Following is a summary of each of the state models prepared by the state's liaison to the CCSSO Resource Center project.

Note, in particular, the following salient features in the four state plans which could be considered by states seeking ways to strengthen their transition programs:

- Idaho's identification of five points about which interagency members must be informed: 1) extent of need for the development of transition services; 2) definitions related to transition; 3) legislation and funding issues; 4) implementation of the interagency transition process; and 5) solutions to barriers encountered when developing pre-employment training, support work options, independent living options, and transition teams;

- Maine's inclusion in the interagency agreement of the specific roles and responsibilities of each agency;

- New York's early referral to vocational rehabilitation for those students who can benefit from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitative Services and ongoing sharing of information and data among special educators, occupational educators, and vocational rehabilitation personnel; and

- Washington's effort to unify its fragmented services through a state-level transition plan.

"The SEA has a responsibility to assure that the handicapped student does not get lost in the shuffle through the education reform sweeping each state at this time."

Richard Bartlett, Consultant for Exceptional Children, Maine Department of Educational and Cultural Services

Idaho

Idaho identified the following three goals as the major outcomes of its model project:

Goal 1– Describe Idaho's process for coordination of agencies involved with the postsecondary transition of disabled youth.

Goal 2– Develop a common interagency philosophy and purpose regarding transition which acknowledges individual agency mandates.

Goal 3– Evaluate the effectiveness of Idaho's agency activities related to transition efforts.

The Idaho model was developed by an Interagency Working Group on Transition (IWG) with representatives from the state's Department of Education, Department of Vocational Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Health and Welfare, Bureau of Developmental Disabilities, Commission for the Blind, and the Idaho Association of Rehabilitative Facilities. A staff member from the Western Regional Resource Center was also a member of the IWG.

Among the informational needs identified by the interagency transition team members were: a) extent of need for the development of transition services; b) definitions related to transition; c) legislation and funding issues; d) implementation of the interagency transition process; and e) solutions to barriers encountered when developing pre-employment training, support work options, independent living options, and transition teams.

The IWG agreed that most adult service agency profesionals have only a vague knowledge of the structure of other agencies. They further agreed that communication and information barriers exist among these professionals and their agencies. In order to solve this problem a Philosophy Statement on Transition was drafted and adopted by the IWG.

To further common understanding and sharing among the agencies, each member of the IWG completed an Interorganizational Linkage Matrix and three interagency evaluations using an Organizational Dimensions Scale, Interorganizational Linkage Matrix and Interunit Relationship Scale. The purpose of these scales was to evaluate the frequency and effectiveness of linkages and other contacts. These surveys provided each individual agency with an overall view of the perceptions of the other agencies as to their roles in planning, management, and/or service delivery to youth with special needs.

The single and specific charge of the IWG has allowed the agencies to operate within their individual mandates and at the same time effectively collaborate on joint services. The dialogue and interaction of the IWG has speeded action by increasing the awareness and understanding of key agency representatives with power and authority to initiate change.

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Maine

The development of a revised interagency cooperative agreement was targeted as the first priority of the Maine/CCSSO Resource Center model project. The State of Maine Interagency Cooperative Agreement Team (SCAT), consisting of representatives from the Division of Special Education, Bureau of Vocational Education, Bureau of Rehabilitation, and the Division of Eye Care, identified the need to revise the original agreement developed in 1979-1980 in order to clarify and delineate agency responsibilities in a workable manner. The original agreement contained a "grid" which showed primary, secondary, or no responsibility for a number of functions. These designations proved problemmatic by permitting individual agencies to avoid the provision of services based upon the designation of a secondary category of responsibility.

A second identified need was to devise a more effective means of implementing the agreement upon adoption by the agencies involved in its development. The SCAT team reviewed materials received from other states via the CCSSO electronic network and elected to draw from various states for its implementation plan.

The revised cooperative agreement includes a section describing each participating agency, including its roles and responsibilities. Each agency's eligibility criteria and the process of determining eligibility for services is clearly defined. SCAT believes that this aspect will give local implementers a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each party involved.

The revised cooperative agreement fits into the process of assurance of transition designed by the state of Maine. The Legislature of 1985 established a Committee on Transition which consists of all agencies responsible for youth and young adults who are disabled. The Committee is interdepartmental and includes parents of disabled students and consumers. The Committee is responsible for the implementation of the cooperative agreement in order to ensure appropriate transition services in the least restrictive environment.

Coupled with the Committee's work, the cooperative agreement should be more applicable and enforceable. In addition to the Committee work, the SCAT has arranged for a series of forums throughout the state for late summer and early fall to discuss the new agreement and receive input from local agency and school personnel. Upon completion of the forums, the SCAT will consider this input and make necessary revisions before having the agreement adopted as rule for all of the involved agencies at both the state and local levels. This should serve to reduce anxiety over the agreement and its implications.

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New York

In New York state the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation, Occupational and Continuing Education, and Education for Children with Handicapping Conditions are all part of the state education department. This structure enhances efforts to improve transition by establishing a common set of priorities and increased level of coordination. A model of cooperative service delivery to increase the level of coordination among the offices of the state education department, field staff, and local school personnel providing services to disabled students has been developed. It is currently being tested and evaluated at six state sites.

The Cooperative Service Delivery Model consists of five main phases which establish a process for linking services that result in integrated services for students with disabling conditions. Five key components of the Model are:

- Increased access to occupational education programs for students with handicapping conditions.
- Consideration of a student's occupational skills during the Committee on Special Education (CSE) evaluation and Individualized Education Program (IEP) development process.
- Early referral to vocational rehabilitation of those students who can benefit from OVR services.
- Sharing information and data among special educators, occupational educators, and vocational rehabilitation personnel.
- Provision for follow-up services to assist the students with handicapping conditions to transition to postsecondary institutions or employment.

Depending upon the participating site, the Cooperative Service Delivery Model is implemented in various ways. However, several key components are felt to be most important for the Model to be implemented in other settings. The following components have been necessary to effectively implement the Model:

- Establish a team composed of special educator, occupational educator, vocational rehabilitation counselor, and team leaders. The team coordinates the conduct of vocational assessments, communication between districts and parents, work-study teams, and program implementation. The team approach is necessary to attain the coordination necessary to achieve the goals of the Model.
- Provide special and occupational educators and vocational rehabilitation counselors with training about one another's programs. This approach eliminates many of the misunderstandings among professionals regarding eligibility or procedures needed to facilitate effective coordination.
- Ensure that teachers working with students have sufficient information either through the student's IEP, conferences, or written reports.
- Initiate extensive outreach efforts to component districts if the occupational education programs are being provided at a centralized service provider facility.
- Allow adequate time for team planning and coordination.
- Ensure support for building linkages at the administrative level in both special and occupational education.
- Bring business and community leaders into the planning process in order to establish linkages for work-study programs or other program components.
- Ensure participation in prevocational program if students with handicapping conditions are not prepared for the hands-on approach required of the secondary level occupational education programs.
- Involve parents in the planning and use them as a resource for the students' programs as well as advisors to the programs.

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Washington

Intensely interested in the area of transition planning and interagency cooperation since 1983, Washington nevertheless described itself two years ago as model rich but system poor. The many transition projects underway were occurring in isolation without the benefit of a system or plan to pull them together or a method of evaluating and sharing critical outcomes and strategies. Due to this fragmented service delivery, Washington sought an interagency state plan for transition as a vehicle to provide a comprehensive framework for those varied transition activities.

The following areas were identified to serve as a framework for the state plan.

- GOVERNANCE: Develop a system of committee structure, legislation, and policy which will promote and direct the activities leading to the establishment and implementation of Washington State's Interagency Plan for Transition.
- STAFF PREPARATION: Establish a system to meet the preservice and inservice training needs of all individuals who provide services (direct and indirect) to persons with disabilities.
- FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: Promote parent/family involvement and knowledge regarding issues of transition from birth to adulthood.
- PRE-AND POST—SCHOOL PROGRAM OPTIONS: Identify types, numbers, and costs of leisure, residential, and vocational supports that will be needed over the next five years for special education school leavers; and support the efforts of the "birth-6 years" state planning grant.
- STUDENT/CHILD PREPARATION (APPROPRIATENESS OF CURRICULUM; PREPARING FOR THE NEXT ENVIRONMENT; ETC.): Redefine "excellence" in education for youth with disabilities from birth to 21.
- RESEARCH AND EVALUATION (INCLUDING DATA COLLECTION/SHARING; ACCOUNTABILITY; BUDGET/PROGRAM PLANNING; EFFECTIVENESS): Design a statewide interagency system for tracking special education school leavers.

To develop the statewide transition plan, a three-tier committee system was established. The Executive Committee is composed of senior staff members from such agencies/bodies as the Office of Public Instruction, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Governor's Office, and Developmental Disabilities Planning Committee. While the Executive Committee was not responsible for the actual development of the state plan, its members' support for the project was seen as critical in ensuring that the plan is ultimately disseminated and used by agencies serving disabled persons. The second tier of the proposed committee system is a coordinating and planning committee responsible for actual development of the state plan. The third tier is comprised of three subcommittees, each given a separate charge.

- The Student Preparation Committee: To develop a plan which recommends changes in the special education curricula which will enhance the quality of life in the community.
- The Transition Bridge Committee: To develop a plan to recommend strategies for improving collaborative planning among schools, families, students, Division of Developmental Disabilities, and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation while the student is still in school for post-school community placement.
- The Post-School Options Committee: To develop a plan to identify types, numbers, costs, and strategies for increasing availability of specialized adult services needed by special education school leavers.

Washington has also decided to support a Senate Resolution to mandate an interagency state plan. Some states have felt that legislation may be unnecessary and could possibly serve as a deterrent, forcing unwilling individuals to come together in a half-hearted effort. In Washington, the legislation was seen as a positive factor giving these agencies a mandate, timeline, and direction for the interagency state plan.

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